

## Special to Roll Call

In recent months, groups such as MoveOn.org and individuals such as former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean (D) have rallied the nation's editorial boards in support of legislation offered by Rep. Rush Holt (D-N.J.) that would require voting systems to produce a "voter-verified paper trail." Most recently, an editorial in favor of the Holt bill was published in Roll Call ("&lsquo;Fraud at Polls'?", Sept. 8).

Before addressing the substance of the issue, I must debunk a widespread and misleading claim that is being spread by these groups and mistakenly published by many newspapers - that the House Republican leadership is somehow responsible for this bill not moving forward.

In March, Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) and Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) joined Senate Majority Whip Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and myself in co-signing a letter in which we expressed our concerns about the Holt bill. The letter makes clear why we do not believe action on the bill is timely or wise. The last time I checked, those two Democrats were, respectively, the House Minority Whip and the ranking member on the Senate Rules and Administration Committee - not positions typically associated with the Republican leadership. I can assure you the Holt bill is not being acted upon because of the concerns we expressed in that letter - and for no other reason. The claim that the House Republican leadership is somehow responsible is simply detached from reality.

As far as the reasons for our opposition, it is useful to consider the central tenet behind the arguments of paper trail proponents: that paper ballots are the only way to ensure an accurate election.

This argument ignores the simple fact that manipulation of paper ballots has been at the root of virtually every case of election fraud in American history. I would also be remiss if I did not note the tremendous irony of this situation - in that the same individuals who decried the November 2000 election and the paper ballots in Florida are now coming back and telling the American people four years later that paper ballots are in fact the only way to ensure a fair election.

The fact is that paper-based systems have a very long and documented history of failure and inaccuracy, with demonstrated error rates that exceed more modern electronic systems. While Holt supporters hold paper out as some sort of guarantor of electoral accuracy and integrity, the reality is paper systems have a long history of problems that electronic systems are designed to prevent.

The House Administration Committee has looked at this issue extensively, including most recently at a hearing in July. At this hearing, one witness, Michael Shamos, a Distinguished Career Professor in the School of Computer Science at Carnegie Mellon University, testified, in part, that while a paper receipt may "assure the voter that her choices were correctly recognized by the machine, it provides no guarantee that the vote was counted or ever will be counted correctly, or that the paper viewed by the voter will even be in existence at the time a recount is conducted. And the paper trail surely does nothing to increase the reliability of a voting machine. If the device won't start on Election Day, then adding a printer to it certainly does not increase its chances of working."

Further, the committee also heard testimony from a top Georgia election official who indicated that prior to the deployment of Georgia's new, modernized electronic voting system, the state's error rate for a top-of-the-ballot race under their old paper ballot system was 4.8 percent. After the implementation of the new voting system, that error rate fell to a miniscule 0.87 percent rate. These figures translate into 71,000 people whose votes were lost in the older paper-based system, but whose votes were counted by the electronic system. Those lost votes under a paper ballot system are real, and they should be acknowledged by those who are warning of unseen and unproven "dangers" posed by newer systems.

Finally, the House Administration Committee has also heard from virtually every major disabled rights group in America, all of whom are opposed to the Holt bill. In a recent letter to Congress, the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities noted that the Holt bill "erodes the rights of voters with disabilities under HAVA" and "eviscerates the accessibility provisions of HAVA."

My reservations about amending the Help America Vote Act to require paper receipts, however, in no way lessen my interest in ensuring that electronic voting systems meet the most rigorous security and operational standards. The American people demand and deserve a voting process in which they can have full confidence. And that is why I am pleased to see that questions regarding voting systems security, as well as many others, are now being examined by the entity responsible for doing so under existing law, the Election Assistance Commission (created by HAVA), in conjunction with the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

Their review should be allowed to continue before Congress recklessly begins imposing new costs and new requirements, just months before the 2004 presidential and Congressional elections, that have not been fully considered.